

October Newsletter Extended Article

## Engaging teachers in the peer observation process

Written by:

*Professional Learning for Educator Effectiveness Coaches Sara Jennings and Diane Still*

Classroom observations offer learning opportunities for both teachers and peers, yet the peer observation process can be a source of tension for educators if a learning climate has not been established. Since the goal of the peer observation process is to enhance learning through collegial conversations, promoting a culture in which every member of the school sees him or herself as a learner, is an essential task of the principal. How can the principal create a culture that allows teachers to participate in regular observations and conferencing while maintaining a schedule that protects teachers' time? Aligning the peer observer process to the professional learning standards and using best practices for collaboration engage teachers in a positive growth experience.

To promote peer observation as a process for improving effectiveness, the school culture must be positive and teachers need to see themselves as learners. Learning Forward includes leadership in the learning standards stating, "Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students requires skillful leaders who develop capacity, advocate, and create support systems for professional learning" (2015).

Principals develop capacity by placing importance on the training for the peer observation process. Peer observations must be performed by peer observers who have received the required training offered through the [KDE online training modules](#). Some principals believe that all teachers benefit from participating in this training which creates relevance by tying the process to teaching goals. Principals also can use the training to hone a consistent view of good teaching. Danielson (2008) recommends that a faculty develop a common understanding of the framework for both evidence collection purposes and to create a common language. Danielson also notes that administrators need to be present for these conversations, which contribute to the culture of the school by sending a message that the principal is part of the learning process. So, it is imperative that principals and instructional leaders participate in the trainings.

Including leadership in the learning process paves the way for teachers to see themselves as a community of learners. The Learning Forward Standards for Professional Learning describe thinking that promotes learning communities with colleagues holding each other accountable for continuous learning. This shifts teachers from working in isolation to teams of teachers working and learning together to establish a culture for learning.

It is important to determine the purpose for the observation.

Is it so the observer learns about the practice of a peer to improve their own teaching?

Is there an area the practicing teacher is concerned about and has asked to have a peer observer provide feedback?

Is there an element of the framework that has been identified by the principal that would benefit the practicing teacher to have a peer observer take a closer look and provide insight?

The peer observer and teacher set data-driven goals, provide with feedback, and evaluate the outcomes.

Administrators can use the following tips ([KDE Time Management Ideas](#)) to establish a system for helping teachers adhere to the calendar and promote a culture of learners within the school:

- use shared calendar in Outlook for scheduling peer observations
- use the PLC process for teachers to pre- and post-conference with one another to avoid additional meetings
- reflect on the Student Growth Goals and Professional Growth Plan and focus on the component chosen by the teacher to be observed as an area for growth
- have a common understanding of the Framework for Teaching
- share the “possible artifacts” document with teachers and include non-examples
- offer teachers a walkthrough document template to script directly under the components of the framework
- match the peers carefully - respect and trust are conducive to learning
- allow teachers to schedule their own peer observations and make arrangements to have their classes covered

In a culture for learning, the peer observation process benefits both the observer and the observed. Mentors report their own practice improving as they train for observation and analyze the observations of others. The observation and conferencing practices should be seen as a method for colleagues to help one another, not to criticize or demean. Just as medical students participate in rounds and share what they observe to learn more about their practice, so too can teachers. When a teacher visits another’s classroom with a defined problem of practice or look-fors, the peer observer records the evidence for specific teacher practices and student responses and later discuss these.

Danielson, C. (2008). Handbook for enhancing professional practice: Using the framework for teaching in your school. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

Learning Forward. Standards for professional learning. Retrieved from the Internet on September 17, 2015 at: [http://learningforward.org/standards#.Vfwj\\_xFViko](http://learningforward.org/standards#.Vfwj_xFViko)

Time Management Ideas from KDE website can be accessed at:

<http://education.ky.gov/teachers/PGES/Documents/PGES%20Time%20Management%20Ideas.pdf>